

A 'very special day'

Social Welfare Department

THE first day of May 2009 was a very special day, not because it was a public holiday, but because it was the beginning of an unforgettable experience for a team from the Social Welfare Department (SWD).



The team, which included members of the Emergency Relief Support Unit and the District Service Unit of SWD, was called out on duty to the Metropark Hotel Wanchai, where a quarantine lockdown was in operation following a confirmed case of human swine influenza (influenza A H1N1)

District Social Welfare Officer (Eastern and Wan Chai), Kitty Yuk Kwok Lai-sum, gave details of the team's involvement.

"As SWD is responsible for emergency relief and providing counselling and psychological support services to victims of natural disasters and confines due to quarantine orders, we were mobilised to help the 300 or so hotel guests and staff by providing emergency relief items and attending to personal needs, special requests and sometimes emotional outbursts," she said.

"At the beginning, there was distress and dissatisfaction among the guests. Nevertheless, they soon became more understanding about the need for quarantine and the difficulties involved in meeting their personal needs."

The guests warmed to their helpers as the days progressed.

"As time went by, and as a result of our innovative arrangement of providing them with a variety of food, such as pizza, fried chicken, baked potatoes, fruit, snacks and beer as well as amusement items such as newspapers,

magazines and playing cards, they became even more appreciative towards the work of the administration," said Mrs Yuk.

"Our social workers at the help desk also reached out, approaching the guests when needed. They listened to their worries, helped to answer their questions or referred them to the appropriate authorities for assistance."

When the quarantine period came to an end, members of the SWD team got a pleasant surprise.

"On the last day of the quarantine, we were surprised to receive a fruit basket from a quarantined couple who wanted to thank us for our work. We also received words of gratitude from other guests in our personal encounters and subsequent emails," she said.

Mrs Yuk said she was proud of the team, who had served the community with dedication and commitment. It was also a valuable learning experience.

"Although the work was tough and challenging, we have gained useful experience and fond memories from the incident," she said.



A group photo of the SWD team.